# Looking for a Hand Up:
# A Profile of Food Bank Recipients in Four Ontario Communities

**Prepared by Beth Wilson**
**Community Social Planning Council of Toronto**

**September 2003**

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The study was made possible by the in-kind support of the Belleville Gleaners, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, the Daily Bread Food Bank, Hamilton Food Share, Loyalist College and the Ottawa Food Bank. We would also like to thank the City of Toronto, Human Resources Development Canada, Supporting Communities Initiative Program and the United Way of Greater Toronto for their financial support.

Finally, I would like to thank the hundreds of people accessing food banks in Belleville, Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto for their participation in this study. They gave not only of their time but also shared personal details of their lives with us. We appreciate your willingness to take part in this study. It is our hope that the research findings will impress upon our elected leaders that the need for action is critical and that time for action is now.

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# Food Bank Facts

- 1,796 food bank recipients took part in the survey including 46.2% single individuals, 24.1% single parents, 20% two-parent families and 9.7% couples without children.
- Children were over-represented in food bank lines with 36.3% of all recipients under the age of 19. In comparison, 26% of the population is 19 years of age or younger.
- 38.3% of food bank recipients had not completed high school, 19.9% had graduated from high school, 20.3% had some post-secondary education or training and 21.5% had a college or university degree.
- More than 70% of all food bank recipients had household incomes that were less than half of Statistics Canada's Low Income Cutoff, a measure used to assess poverty.
- $593 – the median monthly income for individuals living alone
  $580–$891 range of average rents for one-bedroom apartments in the study communities
- Almost 70% of food bank recipients were on provincial social assistance programs – 49.5% on Ontario Works and 20.2% on Ontario Disability Support Program.
- At 13.6%, workers were the third largest group of food bank recipients.
- Two out of five food bank recipients had a disability that restricted their ability to work.
- More than half of food bank recipients with a disability did not receive Ontario Disability Support Program benefits; available data from Belleville and Toronto suggest that over 60% of recipients would no longer need food banks if they were able to get ODSP.
- Over 85% of food bank recipients pay more than 30% of their income toward rent. Over 65% pay more than 50% of their income toward rent, putting them at risk of becoming homeless.
- More than one-third of food bank recipients experienced frequent problems eating a balanced meal and providing one to their families.
- Almost one-quarter of adults experienced hunger at least a couple of times each week despite the assistance of a food bank.
- Over 80% of parents sacrificed their own food to feed their children.
- Despite the efforts of parents to shield their children from the effects of poverty, almost 40% of recipients reported that their children go hungry at least once per month.
- According to national reports, nearly half of all Canadian food banks are unable to meet the need in their communities.

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## Executive Summary

Despite the rapid expansion of food banks across the province and the growth in the number of people accessing Ontario food programs over the past two decades, few studies have documented the circumstances of food bank recipients in Ontario. Food bank clients in Sudbury, Kingston, Toronto and Waterloo Region have been the focus of study. Of particular note, the Daily Bread Food Bank has been conducting an annual survey of food bank recipients in the Greater Toronto Area for more than ten years. Following in the research tradition of the Daily Bread's work, the current study documents the circumstances and experiences of 1,796 individuals accessing food banks in four Ontario communities: Belleville, Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto. Through the administration of a structured questionnaire, interviewers recorded information including the gender, marital status, household composition, educational attainment, employment, income, social assistance, disability status, housing, hunger status and unmet needs of food bank recipients.

This intercity project has provided a means of identifying commonalities and differences across communities. Given the higher cost of living, particularly housing costs, in Ontario's big cities, we might expect to find urban food bank clients with greater needs and facing more hardship than their counterparts in mid-size or small cities with their relatively lower cost of living. Instead, the current research reveals equally disturbing trends among food bank clients across study communities.

The demographic profile of food bank recipients was similar in each community. Food bank clients included slightly more women, people ranging in age from 14 to 86 years with an average age of 41 years, household sizes from 1 to 14 people with a median average of 2 people per household, and large numbers of single individuals and single parents and a disproportionate number of children at 36.3% of all clients.

Virtually all food bank recipients shared the experience of living in poverty with more than 70% reporting household incomes that were less than half of Statistics Canada's Low Income Cutoff, indicating a substantial depth of poverty. While rental housing costs have increased most dramatically in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto in the past few years, lack of affordable housing is a critical issue for the majority of clients in all four communities. More than 85% of food bank recipients spent over 30% of their income on housing, and more than 65% spent over half of their income on housing, leaving the latter group at risk of homelessness.

Most troubling, the majority of adults and many children experienced hunger despite the assistance of a food bank. Almost 60% of adults reported experiencing hunger at least once per month, including nearly one-quarter reporting hunger a couple of days per week. Among households with children, almost 40% reported that their children experienced

hunger at least once per month. Over 80% of parents sacrificed their own food to feed their children, but often it was not enough to prevent child hunger. Rates of child hunger varied somewhat with a low of 34% in Toronto to a high of 50% in Belleville.

Survey results revealed a particularly striking finding. A large number of food bank recipients reported having disabilities that restrict their ability to maintain regular employment, with figures ranging from one-third to nearly half of all clients, varying by community. Among those food bank recipients with disabilities, 55% were not on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Among food bank recipients with disabilities who were not on ODSP, more than 70% were subsisting on the Ontario Works social assistance program with its accompanying lower benefit levels. The current research suggests that over 60% of food bank recipients with disabilities who are not on ODSP would no longer require assistance from food banks if they were able to access even these modest benefits. According to the Ontario government, the ODSP "is intended to meet the needs of people with disabilities and help them to become more independent". Yet, research conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health[1] as well as the Income Security Advocacy Centre[2] has documented the serious barriers that people with disabilities face in successfully accessing the program. Clearly major reforms are needed to ensure access for people with disabilities in need of income assistance.

In addition to the problem of access to ODSP, benefit levels do not approximate the actual cost of living and have been frozen for more than a decade. Similarly, Ontario Works social assistance rates were cut by 21.6% in 1995 and have not been raised since 1993. With rates frozen and sitting well below the poverty line, it is not surprising to note that almost 70% of food bank clients were Ontario Works or ODSP recipients. The working poor constituted the third largest group of food bank recipients at 13.6% of the overall sample. In the 1980s, lack of access to employment was a critical issue for many food bank recipients. Today, low wages and unstable employment have left growing numbers of workers in food bank lines. At $6.85 per hour, Ontario's minimum wage has been frozen since 1995.

Urgent action is needed to improve food security, lessen hunger and reduce the need for food banks in Ontario communities. While the federal government's commitment of new dollars for affordable housing programs is an important first step, substantial long-term investments are needed to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Ontario and across the country. The federal government must ensure that dollars committed are readily accessible to build new housing that is truly affordable for those in need. The provincial government must return to the housing table and begin to commit funds for the provision of affordable housing to ensure that all Ontarians have access to this basic need. Further, major reforms are needed in the area of income assistance to provide proper access to programs and benefits at levels that reflect the actual cost of living in

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[1] Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2003). Barriers to ODSP: Experiences of People with Mental Health and Addictions. Toronto, Ontario: CAMH.

[2] Income Security Advocacy Centre (2003). Denial by Design … The Ontario Disability Support Program. Toronto, Ontario: ISAC. (www.incomesecurity.org)

Ontario communities. As well eight long years later, minimum wage workers are in dire need of a raise. Unlike the minimum wage, the cost of living in Ontario has not remained stagnant. Evidenced by long waiting lists for subsidized child care, many parents with children require affordable, quality child care as a prerequisite for maintaining employment. At the federal and provincial level, new commitments are needed in the area of regulated, affordable child care.

Current housing, income security, labour market and child care policies do not provide a needed 'hand up' for individuals and families reliant on charitable food donations to meet basic needs in Ontario. The upcoming federal and provincial elections will provide a new opportunity for political parties to assert their priorities and present their plans for addressing national and provincial issues. Many voices are needed to bring about change that will ensure that everyone can pay the rent, feed themselves, and if they have children, feed the kids. It is our hope that we will witness a renewed commitment on the part of all parties to address these basic survival issues, to reduce hunger, food insecurity and the need for food banks and to ensure access to affordable housing for all.

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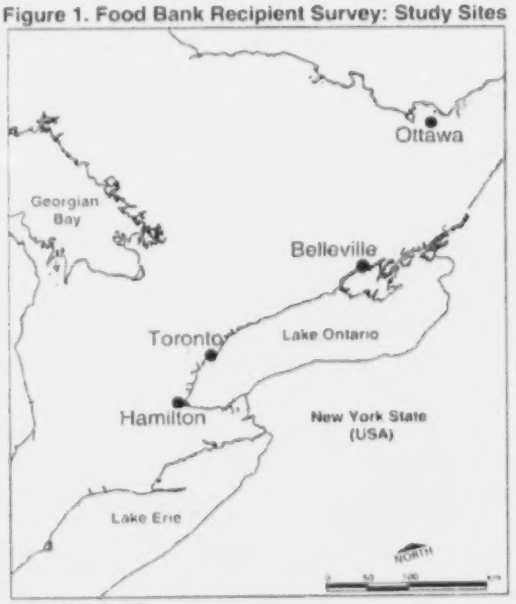
## Introduction

In March 2002, nearly 300,000 people turned to food banks in Ontario for emergency food assistance (Wilson & Tsoa, 2002). Despite the disturbing numbers of people using food banks across the province, relatively few studies have focused on the circumstances and experiences of food bank recipients. In order to arrive at solutions that ensure access to safe, affordable and nutritious food for all – a *basic human need and right* -- it is important to understand the realities of those without such access. This research study focuses on the circumstances of food bank recipients residing in four Ontario communities: Belleville, Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto.

Figure 1. Food Bank Recipient Survey: Study Sites




*Purpose of Study.* In 2002, the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (CSPC), working in partnership with OAFB member food banks and local academic institutions, initiated a multi-community survey of food bank recipients in Ontario. We launched this project in order to: a) better understand the circumstances of people accessing food banks in Ontario

communities, b) review the program and policy issues related to food bank use, and c) develop and promote solutions directed at ensuring income security and ending the need for food banks in Ontario. Results presented in this report are based on research conducted in Belleville, Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto. While research was also conducted in Kingston and Sudbury, too few surveys were gathered to allow for their inclusion in intercity comparisons.

*Roles of Research Partners.* With over 100 member organizations, the OAFB provides support to food banks operating across the province. The CSPC is a centre for social policy research and analysis, community capacity building, community education and advocacy and social reporting. Using the Daily Bread Food Bank's annual recipient survey as a model, staff from the OAFB, Researcher Andy Mitchell from the CSPC, Researcher and Statistician Richard Shillington, Researcher Chris Slosser from the Daily Bread Food Bank and Ottawa Study Coordinator Shelley Munro worked together to create the Ontario food bank recipient survey. In her role as central coordinator, OAFB Coordinator Tanja Kraft developed research guidelines for and invited participation from member food banks, provided support to participating organizations, dispatched summer students to conduct interviews in Hamilton and coordinated data entry activities. Richard Shillington provided direction regarding survey design and study methodology. CSPC Researcher Beth Wilson provided information on research methods, coordinated datasets, conducted statistical analyses, performed literature reviews and produced this report. Ottawa Study Coordinator Shelley Munro conducted an analysis of the Ottawa survey data and created a report which is available through the Ottawa Food Bank.

This multi-city project was made possible through the cooperation and efforts of the following food bank and academic partners: Belleville Gleaners, Loyalist College in Belleville, Hamilton Food Share, and the Ottawa Food Bank. These partners organized and administered the survey in their local communities. Counsellor Laurie Pratt from Loyalist College coordinated the survey administration in Belleville with the assistance of Loyalist College students. Executive Director Joanne Santucci from Hamilton Food Share coordinated the research effort in Hamilton. Shelley Munro from the Ottawa Food Bank organized the administration of the survey in that city. In Toronto, Daily Bread Food Bank's Researcher Chris Slosser provided access to 2002 survey data for inclusion in the current study. The Daily Bread Food Bank has conducted an annual food bank recipient survey for more than a decade.

*Funding and In-Kind Support.* Program funding from the United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto made it possible for the CSPC to participate in this partnership. Hamilton Food Share's involvement in the project was made possible through funding from the Supporting Communities Initiative Program. The Ottawa Food Bank's work was financially supported by Human Resources Development Canada. The research partners wish to express their appreciation to these funders, as well as, the in-kind donations provided by participating food banks, academic institutions and volunteers.

*Survey.* The Ontario food bank recipient survey is a 6-page, 30-item structured questionnaire. Many items were taken from Daily Bread Food Bank's 2002 Toronto

recipient questionnaire to allow for comparison with results from this existing survey. The Ontario survey includes questions pertaining to gender, marital status, household composition, educational attainment, employment, income, social assistance, disability status, housing, hunger and unmet needs. The Ontario questionnaire also includes three modules not included in the Daily Bread survey: student module, children module and seniors' module.

*Participants.* We are grateful to the 1,796 food bank recipients who took part in the study. We appreciate their openness and willingness to share their experiences with study interviewers. One hundred and thirty-seven people in Belleville, 306 in Hamilton, 450 in Ottawa and 903 in Toronto participated in the study.

*Setting.* Participants were interviewed at the following food banks: Belleville Gleaners, Hamilton Food Share and four of its member agencies, nine member agencies of the Ottawa Food Bank, and the Daily Bread Food Bank and 41 of its agencies. While complete privacy was not always possible given the limitations of food bank space, participating organizations attempted to provide private, quiet and comfortable space for the interviews.

*Survey Administration.* With the exception of surveys administered in Hamilton, volunteers conducted the majority of the surveys. OAFB summer staff members conducted interviews in Hamilton. All interviewers participated in a training session

where issues regarding proper survey administration and informed consent were discussed.

Interviewers selected randomly among the individuals who had come to the food bank to request emergency groceries. For example, every 5th person waiting for food was selected. At slower times and in smaller agencies, every 2nd or 3rd person would be selected. The selected individuals were invited to participate in the study. Interviewers informed potential respondents that their decision to participate in the study was voluntary and would not affect their ability to receive assistance from the food bank, their name would not be recorded, and individual information collected was confidential and would not be shared with the food bank. Participants were informed that they could skip any questions that they did not want to answer and could stop at anytime. Food bank volunteers responsible for providing food or conducting intake interviews did not participate as volunteers. Interviewers read each question and recorded the participant's response. Interviewers asked clarifying questions where information provided was unclear or inconsistent with previous responses. In Toronto and Ottawa, bilingual volunteers were recruited to administer surveys in languages other than English. However, the vast majority of surveys were conducted in English.

*Data Analysis*. Standard statistical analyses were conducted. Total household income was recorded for the month when the participant completed the survey. An estimate for annual household income was calculated by multiplying total monthly household income by 12. The 2001 before-tax Low Income Cutoff (LICO) was used in analyses to examine depth of poverty among food bank recipients (National Council of Welfare, 2003). The

LICO is the most commonly used measure to assess extent and depth of poverty. Cutoff figures are based on population and household size. LICO cutoffs are higher for individuals living in larger urban centres compared to smaller cities and towns, and for individuals in larger rather than smaller households.

Note that some surveys were missing information for specific questions and some communities did not use every questionnaire item. Therefore sample sizes vary slightly by analysis.

## Research Findings

### *Profiles of Food Bank Recipients*

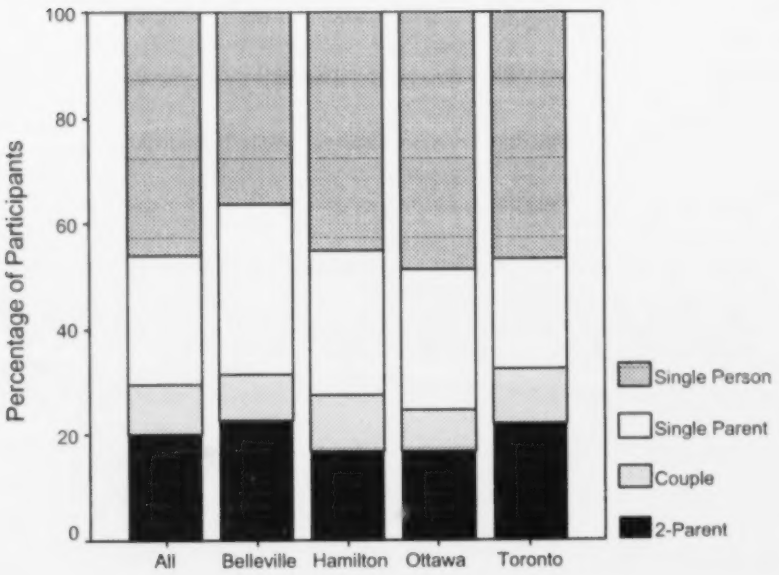
- **Gender** 943 women (52.7%) and 848 men (47.3%)
  - Belleville: 78 women (56.9%) and 59 men (43.1%)
  - Hamilton: 155 women (50.7%) and 151 men (49.3%)
  - Ottawa: 229 women (50.9%) and 221 men (49.1%)
  - Toronto: 481 women (53.6%) and 417 men (46.4%)

- **Age** Participants ranged in age from 14 to 86 with the mean age at 41 years old.
  - Belleville: 38 years old
  - Hamilton: 40 years old
  - Ottawa: 42 years old
  - Toronto: 41 years old

- **Household Size** Participants' household size ranged from 1 to 14 people. The median average for the overall sample and for each community was 2 people per household.

Figure 2 shows the family composition of the overall sample and for each community. In each case, single people made up the largest group of food bank recipients.

Figure 2. Family Composition by Community




- **Single Parent Families** Among single parent families, 353 (82.1%) were led by women and 77 (17.9%) were led by men.
    - Belleville: 32 (72.7%) female and 12 (27.3%) male
    - Hamilton: 69 (82.1%) female and 15 (17.9%) male
    - Ottawa: 95 (80.5%) female and 23 (19.5%) male
    - Toronto: 157 (85.3%) female and 27 (14.7%) male

- **Single People** Among single people, 634 (76.7%) lived alone and 193 (23.3) lived with others.
    - Belleville: 37 (74.0%) lived alone and 13 (26.0%) lived with others
    - Hamilton: 114 (82.6%) lived alone and 24 (17.4%) lived with others
    - Ottawa: 181 (83.0%) lived alone and 37 (17.0%) lived with others
    - Toronto: 302 (71.7%) lived alone and 119 (28.3%) lived with others

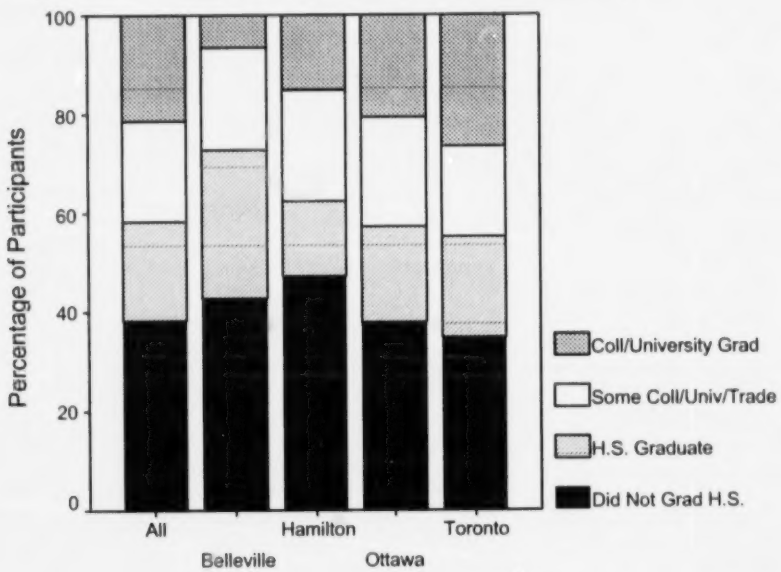
- **Children** 36.3% of food bank recipients in the survey were under the age of 19. In comparison, 26% of the population in these communities is 19 years of age or younger (Statistics Canada, 2001).
    - Belleville: 42.9% of recipients under 19; 25.8% of population 0-19 years
    - Hamilton: 39.5% of recipients under 19; 25.9% of population 0-19 years
    - Ottawa: 36.8% of recipients under 19; 25.8% of population 0-19 years
    - Toronto: 34.1% of recipients under 19; 26.1% of population 0-19 years

Figure 3 shows the educational attainment of the overall sample and by community. Categories represent the percentage of participants without a high school diploma, high school graduates, those with some college, university or trades training, and college and university graduates. While people without a high school diploma made up the largest group of food bank recipients in each case, many participants had post-secondary education.

Thirty-eight percent of food bank recipients had not completed high school. Among food bank recipients without a high school diploma, 10.7% were attending school.

- Belleville: 15.5% who had not finished high school were in school
- Hamilton: 8.4% who had not finished high school were in school
- Ottawa: 11.0% who had not finished high school were in school
- Toronto: 11.0% who had not finished high school were in school

Figure 3. Educational Attainment by Community




- **Income and Income Source** Household incomes varied widely by household size, income source and community. However the vast majority of participants shared one thing in common, living below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cutoff (LICO).

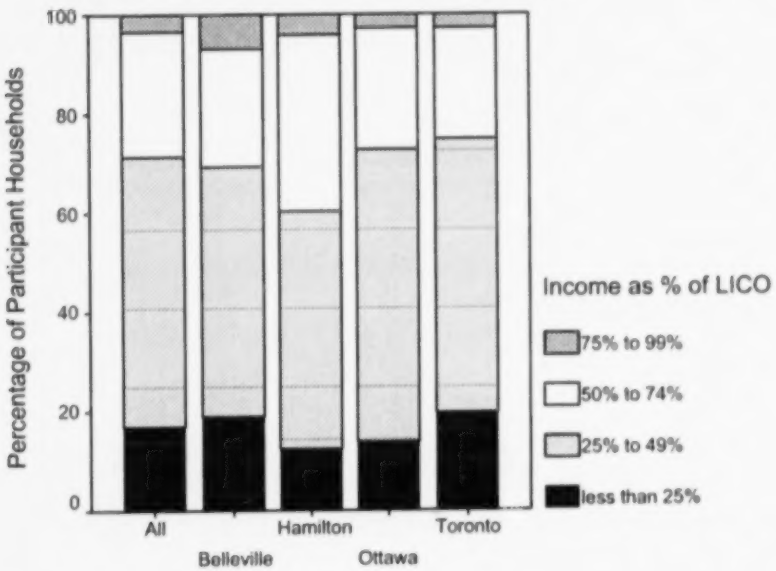
  The LICO is the measure most often used to assess poverty in Canada. To examine the depth of poverty among food bank recipient households, we calculated household income as a percentage of the LICO[3]. Lower percentages reflect households in greater depths of poverty.

[3] Statistics Canada's 2001 Census population figures for the Belleville CA, Hamilton CMA, Ottawa-Hull CMA and Toronto CMA were used in the selection of the appropriate LICOs.

In Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto (CMAs), before-tax LICOs are set at annual household incomes of $19,256, $24,069, $29,934, $36,235, $40,505, $44,775 and $49,043 for households of 1 through 7 or more persons, respectively. In Belleville (CA), before-tax LICOs are set at annual household incomes of $16,401, $20,501, $25,497, $30,864, $34,501, $38,138 and $41,774 for households of 1 through 7 or more persons, respectively.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of participant households at different depths of poverty. More than 70% of all participant households had incomes that were less than half of the LICO, indicating a substantial depth of poverty among food bank recipients.

Figure 4. Income as a Percent of LICO




- Belleville: 69.2% of households had incomes at less than half of the LICO
- Hamilton: 60.4% of households had incomes at less than half of the LICO
- Ottawa: 72.7% of households had incomes at less than half of the LICO
- Toronto: 74.8% of households had incomes at less than half of the LICO

Figures 5 and 6 show the median income for food bank recipients who live alone and for those who are single parents with one child with the corresponding LICOs for each community. In all cases, median monthly income falls well below the corresponding LICO. In every community, the median monthly incomes of food bank recipients living alone are less than 40% of the corresponding LICO. For single parents with one child in each community, the median monthly income falls below 55% of the LICO with most falling below half of the corresponding LICO. Similar findings emerge for other family types (data not shown).

Figure 5. Food Bank Recipients' Median Income:

Individuals Living Alone

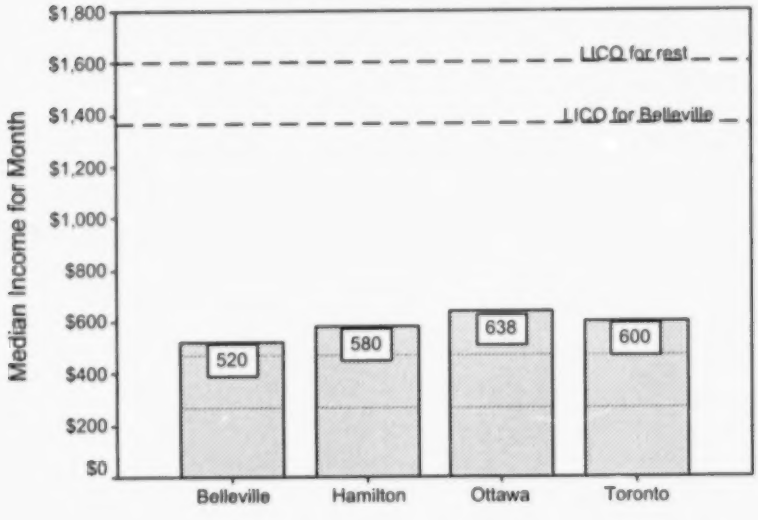


Figure 6. Food Bank Recipients' Median Income:

Single Parent with One Child

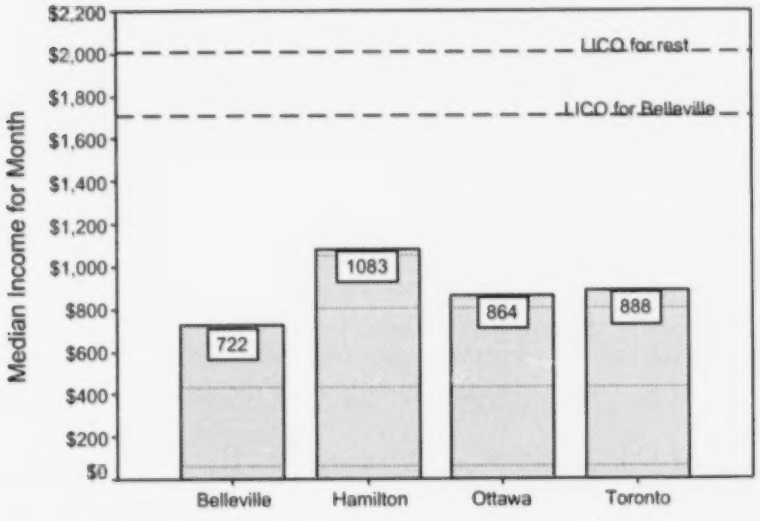
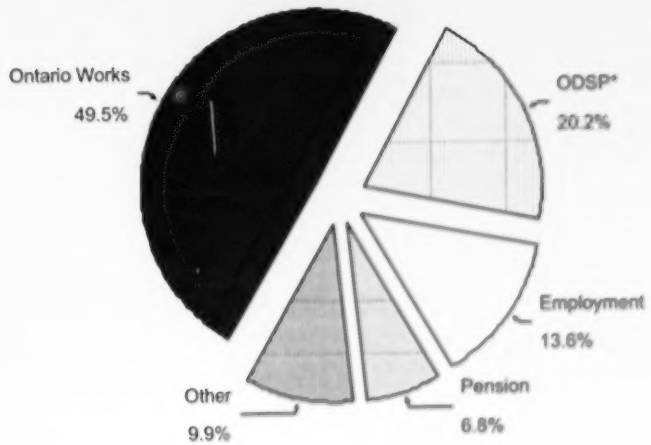



Figure 7 shows the percentage of participants by major source of income. Almost 70% of all food bank recipients received the majority of their income through one of two provincial social assistance programs: Ontario Works (OW), the province's main income assistance program and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), the province's income assistance program for people with disabilities. OW recipients made up the largest group of food bank recipients, including almost half of all study participants. ODSP recipients constituted the second largest group with about one in five food bank recipients in receipt of this disability support. The working poor and pensioners made up the next two largest categories of food bank recipients.

'Other' includes participants receiving the majority of their income from: child support, Canada Child Tax Benefit, Employment Insurance, Ontario Student Assistance Program, Worker's Compensation, maternity leave benefits, survivor's benefits, Children's Aid Society, immigration support funds, family and friends.

Figure 7. Participants' Major Source of Income




* Ontario Disability Support Program

- **Income and Income Source** The majority of participants reported only one income source. Among participants with more than one source, their largest income source made up 50% or more of their total income for almost 95% of cases. The top three sources of income by community are:
  - Belleville: Ontario Works (54.1%), Employment (18.9%), ODSP (14.4%)
  - Hamilton: Ontario Works (50.5%), ODSP (26.3%), Employment (11.9%)
  - Ottawa: Ontario Works (50.0%), ODSP (21.0%), Pension (10.7%)
  - Toronto: Ontario Works (48.3%), ODSP (18.4%), Employment (15.5%)

- **Disability Status and ODSP**
  41.5% of food bank recipients reported that they have a disability that restricts them from obtaining or holding regular employment
  - Belleville: 32.3% of recipients have a disability
  - Hamilton: 45.1% of recipients have a disability
  - Ottawa: 45.9% of recipients have a disability
  - Toronto: 39.5% of recipients have a disability

- 55.4% of recipients with a disability that restricts them from obtaining or holding regular employment do not receive ODSP; 71.9% of recipients with a disability who do not receive ODSP are on the Ontario Works social assistance program
  - Belleville: 65.1% of participants with a disability do not receive ODSP
  - Hamilton: 45.5% of participants with a disability do not receive ODSP
  - Ottawa: 52.3% of participants with a disability do not receive ODSP
  - Toronto: 59.9% of participants with a disability do not receive ODSP

**What Impact Would ODSP Benefits Have on Participants with a Disability Who Don't Get It?** As ODSP offers a substantially higher rate of assistance than Ontario Works (although still well below the poverty line), we tested whether receipt of ODSP could conceivably end the need for food banks among recipients with a disability who are not receiving it. The following steps were involved in this calculation:

- **ODSP Estimate:** First, we calculated the monthly amount that each person would receive on ODSP based on their household size, family composition, boarder vs. renter/homeowner status and actual housing costs. ODSP rates are also based on the disability status of partner/spouse and the age of each child. As this latter information was not collected, we calculated conservative estimates by using figures for children under age 13 and partners without a disability. For individuals with children aged 13 and over and/or partners with a disability, benefit levels are higher.

- **Difference Between ODSP Estimate and Actual Income:** The difference between ODSP estimates and actual income was calculated.

- **Additional Money Needed to End Need for Food Bank Assistance:** A subset of participants was asked to report the amount of additional money that they would need each month in order to no longer need assistance from a food bank.

- **Would ODSP End Their Need for Food Banks?** To see if ODSP benefits would likely end the need for food banks among these recipients, we compared the extra amount needed with the difference between their actual income and the amount that they would receive on ODSP. Based on 142 recipients in Belleville and Toronto with complete data (Hamilton and Ottawa datasets did not allow for this calculation), estimates suggest that:

    - 62.7% would no longer need food banks if they were on ODSP
    - 37.3% would still need food assistance

    For those who would still need assistance in addition to ODSP benefits:
    - 32.1% would need $100 or less each month to not need food banks
    - 24.5% would need $101-$200 each month to not need food banks
    - 5.7% would need $201-$300 each month to not need food banks
    - 37.7% would need $301 or more each month to not need food banks

- **Homelessness** While the majority of food bank recipients have housing, 61 (3.4%) reported some form of homelessness including living in a hostel, motel, couch-surfing or having no place to live.
    - Belleville: 6 (4.4%) were homeless
    - Hamilton: 7 (2.3%) were homeless
    - Ottawa: 11 (2.5%) were homeless
    - Toronto: 37 (4.1%) were homeless

- 9% of recipients live in rooming houses
- 16.9% of recipients do not have a private kitchen
- 16.3% of recipients do not have a private bathroom

- **Core Housing Need** Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines core housing need using three criteria: 1) affordability – the amount of money spent on rent compared to income, 2) suitability – the size of housing relative to the number of people in the household, and 3) adequacy – the condition of the housing with respect to safety and major repairs (CMHC, 1991). Individuals and families in core housing need include those that are homeless, spend more than 30% of their income toward housing costs, live in overcrowded conditions[4], and/or live in housing with significant safety issues or in need of major repairs. We were able to examine the extent of core housing need among food bank recipients with respect to the affordability and suitability criteria.

  **Affordability** Figure 8 shows the percentage of food bank recipients who lack affordable housing including those who spend more than 30% of their income and those who spend more than half of their income toward shelter costs. The latter group is considered at risk of becoming homeless.

  **Suitability** 12.4% of food bank recipients with housing live in overcrowded conditions, placing them in core housing need. As explained in the footnote below, this figure likely underestimates the extent of crowding among food bank recipients. As shown below, Ottawa and Toronto food bank recipients had the highest rates of crowding:
  - Belleville: 9 (6.9%)
  - Hamilton: 18 (6.0%)
  - Ottawa: 52 (12.6%)
  - Toronto: 123 (15.6%)

- **Core Housing Need** In total, 1,451 (81.5%) food bank recipients are in core housing need either due to lack of affordable housing or to overcrowding or both.
  - Belleville: 103 (76.3%)
  - Hamilton: 258 (84.3%)
  - Ottawa: 352 (78.9%)
  - Toronto: 738 (82.6%)

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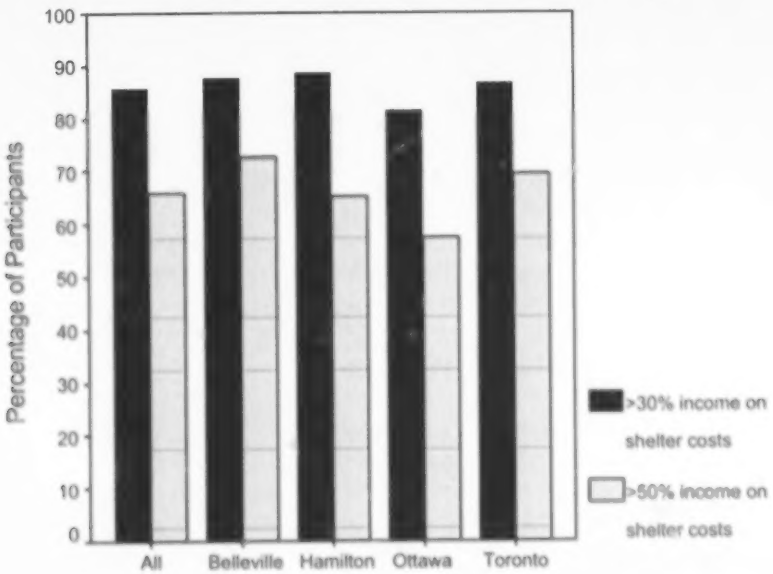
[4] According to the National Occupancy Standard, the suitability criteria is met when there are no more than two people per bedroom and when there is one bedroom for each of the following: cohabitating adult couples, each unattached household member 18 years of age and over; same-sex pair of children under age 18; additional boy and/or girl in the family, unless there are two opposite-sex siblings under the age of 5, in which case they are expected to share a bedroom. For a one-person household, a bachelor apartment is sufficient to meet the suitability criteria (CMHC, 1991). As the gender and age of children and the relationships between adults in households of more than 3 adults was not known, we assessed housing suitability by assuming that children could share bedrooms together (up to 2 per bedroom) and that adults could share bedrooms together (up to 2 per bedroom). Use of these scenarios results in an underestimation of the actual extent of crowding among food bank recipients.

Figure 8. Participants without Affordable Housing




- **Hunger and Compromised Nutrition** Figure 9 shows the percentage of participants that report experiencing hunger due to inadequate household income to purchase food. Figure 10 shows the percentage of participants that report that their children experience hunger.

- 41.8% of food bank recipients <u>often</u> sacrifice their own food to feed their children, and an additional 39.4% report <u>sometimes</u> sacrificing their own food to feed their children
    - Belleville: 41.3% often and 42.9% sometimes sacrifice their own food
    - Hamilton: 41.6% often and 39.2% sometimes sacrifice their own food
    - Ottawa: 42.1% often and 38.3% sometimes sacrifice their own food
    - Toronto: question not included in survey

- 34.6% of food bank recipients report frequent problems eating a balanced meal and providing balanced meals to their children, including food from all four major food groups (grain, fruits and vegetables, milk products, and meat and meat alternatives)
    - Belleville: 37.5 %
    - Hamilton: 29.6%
    - Ottawa: 37.3%
    - Toronto: question not included in survey

Figure 9. Frequency of Adult Hunger

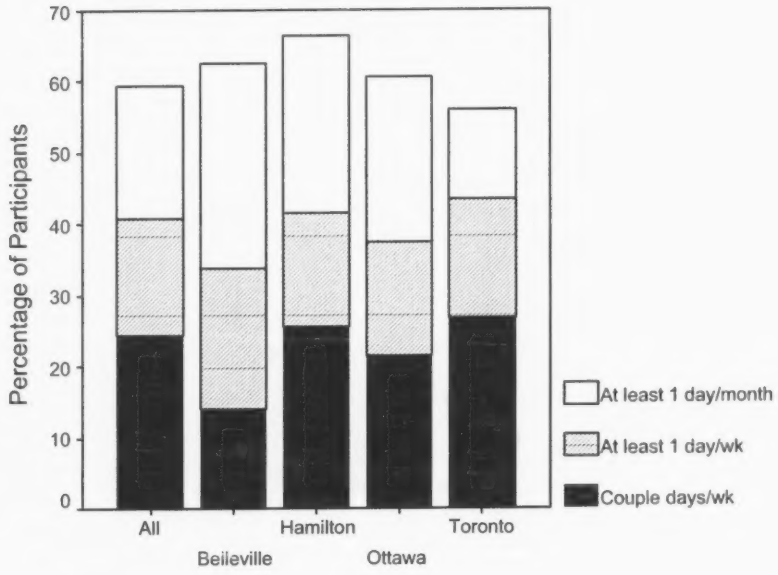
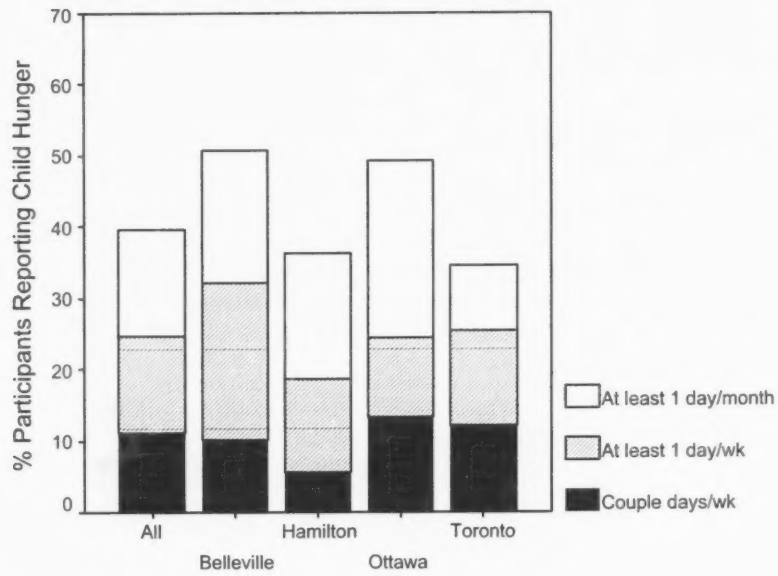



Figure 10. Frequency of Child Hunger



# ANALYSIS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

## *Children, Single Parents and One-Person Households Over-Represented in Food Bank Lines*

While food banks assist all types of families, children and single parent families were over-represented in food bank lines relative to the numbers in the general population within each community. Children and youth accounted for over 35% of all food bank recipients, while just over one-quarter of the population in these four communities is 19 years of age or younger. This pattern is consistent with the results of national food bank surveys conducted in Canada and the United States and Canadian population studies assessing household food insecurity (e.g. Wilson & Tsoa, 2002; Kim, Ohls & Cohen, 2001; Che & Chen, 2001). National population research also finds lone parent households with higher rates of food insecurity and compromised diet, particularly among women, compared to couples with and without children (Che & Chen, 2001). Similarly, poverty statistics confirm the economic vulnerability of lone parents in Ontario. According to the National Council of Welfare's *Poverty Profile 1999* (2002a), thirty-eight per cent of single mothers in Ontario live in poverty compared to only 7% for all families in the province.

For many parents and particularly single parents, access to affordable quality child care is recognized as an important and often essential support to obtaining and maintaining employment. Yet in 2001,

**Snapshot from Belleville**

From 2001 to 2002, Gleaners Food Bank of Belleville has seen a 20% increase in the number of clients served emergency hampers on their premises.

The vast majority of food bank clients are Ontario Works recipients. We are seeing more disabled clients as well. Between 2001 and 2002, the number of seniors, working poor and those with no income more than doubled.

To address these increases, the food bank introduced evening hours and delivery service for seniors.

**Snapshot from Hamilton**

From 2001 to 2002, the number of people assisted by Hamilton Food Share increased by 10%. Agencies have experienced a rise in the number of new clients, people with disabilities, families, and in the size of families.

Many clients have experienced rent increases and have nowhere to go given the 1.6% vacancy rate.

We are concerned about the number of clients with no income including people temporarily cut off from welfare and those having difficulty receiving assistance. Some agencies cite welfare reforms as the major factor contributing to this increase.

Ontario had only 173,135 regulated child care spaces, providing access to quality affordable care for less than 10% of Ontario's 2 million children under the age of 13 (Campaign 2000, 2003). In Ontario, 34,000 families are on waiting lists for subsidized child care (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, 2003). In Toronto, almost 15,000 children are on the waiting list including 7,747 children in immediate need of child care (Children's Services Division, 2003). As well, user fees for non-subsidized spaces have increased despite attempts by local government to make up for lost provincial funding (Toronto Children and Youth Action Committee, 2002).

At the crux of the issue, senior levels of government have failed to initiate a systemic response to ensure access to affordable, quality child care across Ontario. Although seven years after its 1993 Red Book promise to institute a national child care program, the federal government has begun to increase funding for children's services in Canada. Under the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) devised in 2000, the federal government committed $2.2 billion over five years for new children's programming (City of Toronto, 2003). While introducing a welcome increase, the federal government did not earmark dollars specifically to child care programs, leaving provincial governments free to allocate funds to children's programs as they see fit. The Ontario provincial government has not invested any of its $266 million in ECDI funding to child care programs, earning it the reputation

in the community as an 'abc' or 'anything but child care' government (Campaign 2000, 2003). Despite its claims of providing support to out-of-work Ontarians to aid in their re-entry into the labour force, the provincial government has cut more than $160 million from its own spending on child care since 1995.

Targeted to poor families with children, the federal government's National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) provides annual support of $1,293 for the first child, $1,087 for the second child and $1,009 for each additional child with increases to take effect in July 2003 (National Child Benefit, no date). In Ontario, the provincial government deducts these cash payments dollar-for-dollar from the cheques of welfare-poor families, leaving children of social assistance recipients no better off (National Council of Welfare, 2002b). While the supplement is conceived as a measure to combat child poverty, the federal government has failed to ensure that the poorest children in the country will benefit from it. Clearly, parents on social assistance in food bank lines are in great need of this assistance.

In addition to children and single parent families, one-person households were also over-represented among food bank clients in Hamilton, Ottawa and Belleville. Just over one-quarter of households in Hamilton and in Ottawa are one-person, compared to 38% and 41.7% of all food bank households in each community, respectively. In Toronto, just over one-fifth of all households are one-person compared to 34.4% for food bank households. The percentage of one-person households in Belleville was similar at 25.5% for the entire

**Snapshot from Ottawa**

From 2001 to 2002, the number of people accessing food relief programs across the Ottawa Carleton region increased by 5%.

While social assistance recipients continue to represent the largest group of food bank clients, the number of working people using food banks has doubled in the last five years.

We have seen a dramatic rise in the number of people accessing food bank services for the first time with most agencies reporting a 20% increase over last year.

Once the rent is paid, the average food bank user in Ottawa has $5.00 per day to cover everything else.

**Snapshot from Toronto**

From 2001 to 2002, the number of people accessing food relief programs across Greater Toronto increased by 11%.

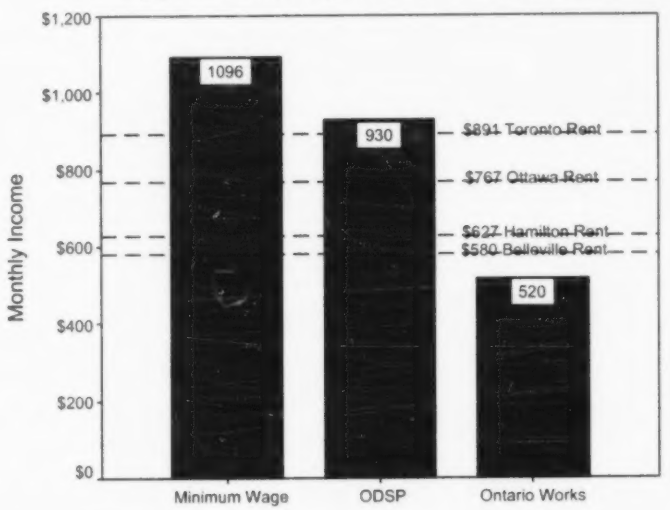
While welfare recipients continue to represent the largest client group, the number of working people using food banks increased by 50% since 2000.

60% of all newcomers to Canada relying on food banks have at least some college or university education, reflecting the significant barriers they face getting foreign training and experience recognized in the Canadian labour market.

population compared to 28.4% for households accessing the food bank. In one-person households, a single paycheque or the meagre amount provided through provincial social assistance programs undermines the ability of individuals to meet basic needs, particularly for urban dwellers with high cost of living and rental fees.

Figure 11 shows the average cost of rental housing for a one-bedroom apartment in each community in comparison to the monthly income of a minimum wage worker, an ODSP recipient and an Ontario Works (OW) recipient in a one-person household.[5] Average cost of housing exceeds the maximum OW benefit level in all four communities. While substantially higher than OW benefits, ODSP rates and full-time minimum wage earnings still leave renters at average market rates in core housing need.

Figure 11. Monthly Income and Average Rents




[5] Rental housing costs are taken from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2002, October) rental survey. Minimum wage income reflects gross earnings for full-time worker at 40 hours per week.

*Education and Training*

At twice the percentage found in Ontario's general adult population (Statistics Canada, 2001), almost two out of five food bank recipients had not completed secondary school. The highest level of education for another one out of five food bank recipients was secondary school. National food insecurity and poverty statistics reveal a similar vulnerability among people with limited formal education and training (Che & Chen, 2001; National Council of Welfare, 2002a). Among food bank recipients without a high school diploma, only about 10% were attending school.

As people with higher levels of education and training are more likely to find living wage jobs, issues of access to academic and training programs are critical to the employment prospects of food bank recipients with limited formal education. Despite the need, Ontarians face substantial barriers to accessing educational programs. During the mid-1990s, the provincial government cut funding levels for adult education, altered the formula for calculating adult education funding levels, resulting in further cuts, and removed adult education from the public education mandate, allowing school boards to eliminate adult education programs (Task Force on Adult Education, 2002; OECTA, 1996; OSSTF, 1999). Between 1993 and 1997, Ontario experienced an unprecedented decline in adult education participation after decades of growth and despite unmet demand for programs (Livingstone, 2001). As well, large tuition fee increases for post-secondary education have created barriers for high school graduates seeking further education. For example, average undergraduate arts program fees in Ontario have increased by more than 150% since 1996 (Canadian Federation of Students, 2003). Hefty

tuition fees and the promise of unmanageable student loan debt constitute serious barriers to entering post-secondary programs.

While a large number of food bank recipients had limited formal education, more than 40% completed at least some post-secondary education or training including one in five with a college or university degree. Although people with more formal education are less likely to live in poverty and experience its effects such as hunger and food insecurity (National Council of Welfare, 2002a; Che & Chen, 2001), clearly many food bank recipients with post-secondary education are impacted as well. In part, this may be due to a problem faced by many highly educated immigrants in Ontario, a lack of recognition of internationally acquired education and skills. Results from the Spring 2002 Daily Bread Food Bank survey reveal that 59% of all immigrants accessing food banks in Toronto had a post-secondary education (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2002a). Further research is needed to better understand the specific issues impacting immigrants accessing food banks throughout Ontario.

### *Poverty, Income Assistance and Work*

Not surprisingly, food bank recipients live in poverty with the majority reporting incomes at 50% or less than the Low Income Cutoff, Canada's unofficial poverty line. Consistent with previous food bank reports (eg. Smilek, Bidgood, Parent & Thompson, 2000; Wilson & Tsoa, 2002), social assistance recipients make up the largest group of food bank recipients. Benefit levels under OW, the provincial welfare program, are well below the poverty line, ranging from 37% of the LICO for single individuals to 60% of the LICO for a single parent with one child (National Council of Welfare, 2002b).

OW benefits are made up of a shelter allowance portion to cover the cost of housing and a basic needs portion to cover all remaining costs such as food, clothing and transportation. Yet shelter allowance levels do not begin to reflect the actual cost of housing in Ontario. For one-, two- and three-person households, shelter allowances are set at $325, $511 and $554, respectively (Social Assistance Programs Branch, 2000). But even in Belleville, the smallest and least expensive study community, the average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment is $580 (CMHC, 2002, October). For single people living alone in the study communities, average housing costs range from 1.78 (Belleville) to 2.74 (Toronto) times greater than the OW shelter allowance. To maintain housing, social assistance recipients often resort to using their food budget to pay the rent, resulting in less food in the cupboard and greater reliance on food charities to meet their basic needs (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2002b; Smilek, Bidgood, Parent & Thompson, 2000).

April 1, 2003 marked the ten-year anniversary of the last time social assistance rates had been raised in Ontario, when the NDP government increased rates by 1% (National Council of Welfare, 1997). In 1995, the provincial government cut rates by a staggering 21.6%, leading to an immediate increase in food bank use across the province (personal communication, Sue Cox, May 1, 2003). In a recent study on the adequacy of welfare rates to provide for a nutritious diet, researchers Vozoris, Davis and Tarasuk (2002) confirmed what was evident to many social assistance recipients in food bank lines, OW rates are inadequate to provide a nutritious diet in most instances. Using food and shelter estimates for three different household types, these researchers found welfare incomes for a single person and a two-parent family inadequate to afford a nutritious diet. For a single parent family, the total annual income surpassed basic expenses for the year

but on a monthly basis, fell below expenses for six months out of twelve. Despite the demonstrated inadequacy of OW to meet basic needs, international criticism of the program from the United Nations (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1998, December 10) and calls from community groups to raise the rates, the provincial government has failed to adjust benefit levels to reflect the actual cost of living. Food banks bear witness to the consequences of this choice.

ODSP recipients are the second largest group of food bank recipients, with one in five food bank recipients on the program. ODSP recipients ranked second in all communities with the exception of Belleville where the working poor outnumbered people on ODSP as the second largest group accessing food banks. Although ODSP rates are significantly higher than OW rates, they remain well below the poverty line, at 64% of the LICO for single individuals, and have been frozen for a decade (National Council of Welfare, 2002b). Similar to OW benefit levels, ODSP rates do not approximate the actual cost of living in Ontario communities.

At more than 13% overall, the working poor constituted the second largest group in Belleville and the third largest group of food bank recipients in Toronto and Hamilton. According to longitudinal research conducted in Toronto, food banks have experienced a large increase in the number of people with jobs in need of emergency food assistance (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2003). In eight years, the percentage of workers accessing Toronto food banks more than doubled from 8% in 1995 to 19% in 2003.

Similar to OW and ODSP rate freezes, Ontario's minimum wage at $6.85 per hour has not increased in many years. Last raised in 1995, its value has eroded by 11.5% in the past seven years (Battle, 2003). In 2000, an estimated 223,500 Ontarians were

employed at minimum wage. In addition to the minimum wage rate freeze, the nature of work has shifted significantly from permanent full-time employment toward a proliferation of contingent, non-standard positions including temporary, contract, part-time, day labour and on-call jobs (Vosko, 2000; Contingent Workers Project, 2000). As contingent work is often characterized by low wages, few benefits and little stability, these workers experience considerable stress from their struggle to meet basic needs.

Through its introduction of the new Employment Standards Act (ESA) in 2000, the provincial government further increased the vulnerable status of many Ontario workers (Employment Standards Work Group, 2001, October 4). In Ontario, non-unionized workers rely entirely on the ESA for legal protection and fair treatment in the workplace. Of particular concern, the provincial government introduced "voluntary agreements" under the new ESA, whereby employers and workers can enter into arrangements regarding the terms and conditions of employment that had been in contravention of the former ESA. These agreements provide a mechanism for employers to introduce a 60-hour work week and 11-hour work days, and to undermine access to overtime entitlement. The provincial government's ESA and its introduction of voluntary agreements have paved the way for the creation of new classes of workers with declining access to basic rights. Workers with the fewest legal protections, those occupying low wage and contingent positions, are most vulnerable to experience exploitation under this new legislation.

*People with Disabilities and Income Security*

Two out of five food bank recipients reported having a disability that restricted their ability to find and secure employment. While in need of income assistance, more than half of food bank recipients with disabilities were not on ODSP and almost two-thirds of those individuals were subsisting on meagre OW benefits. A similar pattern emerged in each community.

Consistent with these findings, researchers have documented a disturbing lack of accessibility to ODSP for people with disabilities. In a 2003 report, the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC) described the multiple barriers people with disabilities face in gaining access to ODSP (ISAC, 2003). In particular, ISAC identified several barriers to the successful navigation of the province's new telephone intake system including: lack of access to a telephone, communication barriers, mental disabilities, physical disabilities, cultural barriers and lack of legal and administrative sophistication. As suggested in the report, the telephone intake system, which replaced in-person meetings between workers and applicants as standard intake practice, is at best a system designed without consideration of client needs or at worst a deliberate action to reduce access to ODSP for people with disabilities. In addition, the researchers raised serious concerns regarding a lack of clarity, consistency and transparency in the disability determination process and long delays in decision-making frequently faced by applicants. Among failed ODSP claimants who appealed the program's decision at the Social Benefits Tribunal in 2000/01, nearly half were successful in having the original decision overturned and were subsequently able to access ODSP benefits. The rate of successful appeals reveals a serious problem in the initial assessment of ODSP cases.

Available survey data from Belleville and Toronto suggest that more than 60% of food bank recipients with disabilities who are not receiving ODSP would not require the assistance of food banks if they were able to access even these modest benefits. The failure of the provincial government to enact a fair and just disability support program has left people with disabilities in food bank lines, wanting for the basic needs of life.

### *Housing Affordability: A Food Security Issue*

For the vast majority of food bank recipients, housing costs constitute the largest household expense. More than 85% of food bank recipients lack affordable housing paying upwards of 30% of their income toward shelter costs. Spending half of their household income or more on housing, more than 65% of recipients are considered at risk of homelessness. As well, a small number of recipients are homeless, living in shelters and temporary accommodations and more than 12% live in overcrowded conditions, with crowding disproportionately affecting urban dwellers in Ottawa and Toronto.

In addition to living in poverty and without adequate access to food, lack of affordable housing is one of the common experiences shared by most food bank recipients across communities. Recent research has found increasing numbers of Toronto recipients living in unsafe and poor quality housing as well (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2002b). To effectively address food insecurity and hunger in Ontario, senior levels of government must begin building affordable housing again.

After years of cuts to and downloading of housing programs, the federal government has begun to commit new funds. In the 2001 budget, the federal government confirmed a commitment of $680 million for new housing programs in Canada over a 5-

year period including $245 million for Ontario (Department of Finance Canada, 2001; Shapcott, 2003). In the 2003 budget, the federal government committed $320 million for new housing over the next five years (Department of Finance Canada, 2003). The 2003 budget included an additional $256 million for housing renovation programs and $270 million for homelessness initiatives to be spent over two years. Yet, current funding levels for affordable housing remain greatly inadequate to meet existing need.

The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, the National Housing and Homelessness Network and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities have advised that an additional $2 billion annually from the federal government with matching funds from provincial and municipal governments is needed over a 10-year period to create a responsive national housing strategy (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2000; National Housing and Homelessness Network, 2001; Toronto Disaster Relief Committee, no date). To date, none of the federal funds announced in 2001 have resulted in additional affordable housing in Ontario.

For their part, the provincial government halted the building of new affordable housing, downloaded responsibility to cash-strapped municipalities and removed rent controls on vacant rental units, resulting in dramatic increases in rental housing costs across the province (Shapcott, 2003). In particular, tenants in Toronto and Ottawa experienced large increases in rental housing costs since the removal of rent control in 1998. Between 1998 and 2002, average rental housing costs in Toronto increased by a range of 19.1% to 23.8%, varying by apartment size, with bachelor and one-bedroom apartments showing the largest increase over time (CMHC, 2002, October; CMHC, 2001, October). During the same period, average rental costs in Ottawa increased by a range of

15.0% to 24.8%, varying by apartment size, with bachelor, one- and two-bedroom apartments showing similarly large increases. In Hamilton, increases ranged from 15.5% to 16.7% in the same time period. In contrast, average rental costs in Belleville showed slight increases from a range of 3.1% to 5.0% since 1998.

Under current federal-provincial housing agreements, provincial governments or third parties such as municipalities must provide matching funds in order to access new federal housing dollars. In response to the federal government's 2001 commitment of $245 million for affordable housing in Ontario, the provincial government has pledged a paltry $20 million, leaving municipal governments and other third parties to raise the additional dollars to access this desperately needed money (Shapcott, 2003). Similarly, the 2003 federal commitment of $320 million will require matching funds from the provincial government or third parties. Lacking the necessary funding or taxing powers to generate needed revenue, municipalities are poorly equipped to play a lead role in the funding of affordable housing programs. To maximize the impact of the federal contributions, the provincial government must return to its responsibilities for providing affordable housing in Ontario. While the federal government has taken some positive steps in recent years, the new housing dollars amount to only 10% of the additional funds needed on an annual basis to ensure that every Ontarian and every Canadian has a safe and affordable home (Shapcott, 2003). Ongoing and substantial commitments are required by all levels of government to realize this goal.

*Hunger and Compromised Nutrition*

Despite the assistance of food banks, most adult recipients report experiencing hunger themselves with nearly one-quarter experiencing hunger at least a couple of days per week. As has been reported elsewhere (Applied Research Division, 1999), survey findings revealed that parents routinely sacrifice their own food in an attempt to feed their children. Despite these efforts, almost 40% of parents report that their children experience hunger at least once a month, including more than one in ten parents who report that their children go hungry at least a couple of days per week. Consistent with nutritionist studies of food bank recipient diets (Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999), more than one-third of recipients have frequent problems eating nutritionally balanced meals and providing them to their families. The number of people experiencing hunger among Toronto's food bank clientele has increased substantially over the past eight years. In a 2003 survey, 47.6% of food bank respondents reported experiencing hunger at least once a week compared to 15.4% in 1995 (Daily Bread Food Bank, 2003). Child hunger showed a similar increase.

National research has demonstrated the inability of food banks to meet increasing needs in their communities. A recent report found that almost half of all food banks in Canada experienced problems keeping pantry shelves stocked (Wilson & Tsoa, 2002). More than one-third had to buy food when they usually did not. As well, one in five food banks were compelled to further ration limited supplies of food, providing smaller quantities of food to recipients. Through cumulative cutbacks and withdrawal from critical social programs, the federal and provincial governments have effectively offloaded the responsibility for ensuring that all Ontarians have adequate access to the

basics of life including access to food. Despite attempts to bridge the gap, the charitable and non-profit sectors are not able to provide the needed quantity or quality of food required to ensure healthy nutrition and development. For food bank recipients and their children, the consequences are clear.

## *Recommendations*

Based on the research findings and analysis, we offer the following recommendations to reduce poverty, food insecurity and hunger, and to lessen the need for food banks in communities across Ontario:

- **Recommendations to all levels of government**

1) Senior levels of government have demonstrated an ability to set targets, establish timelines and enact policy change to reduce debt and deficits. We urge all levels of government to use poverty, food insecurity and food bank statistics in a similar fashion to inform government budgets with accompanying targets, timelines and plans of action.

- **Recommendations to the federal government**

2) Increase funding for Early Childhood Education and Care services to $2 billion per year for the next four years. Extend and increase funding under the ECDI agreement with funds specifically earmarked for quality regulated child care services.[6]

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[6] Position consistent with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (http://www.childcareontario.org/)

3) Take action to end the provincial clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement to ensure that all poor children may benefit from this important support.

4) Increase federal contributions to affordable housing programs to $2 billion annually and ensure that all federal funds for affordable housing result in the timely creation of housing that is truly affordable to those in need.[7]

- **Recommendations to the provincial government**

5) Reinstate funding for regulated child care to pre-1995 levels and increase funding each year until universal access is achieved.[8]

6) Stop the clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement from welfare-poor families, ensuring that all poor children may benefit from this important support.

7) Revise the educational funding formula to include adequate levels of funding specifically earmarked for adult education programs, including English as a Second Language courses. Replace the Ontario Works' mandatory workfare program with meaningful training opportunities tailored to the individual needs of recipients. To improve financial access to post-secondary education programs, freeze and reduce tuition fees and introduce grants programs.

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[7] Position consistent with the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee's 1% Solution (http://www.tdrc.net)
[8] Position consistent with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (http://www.childcareontario.org/)

8) Increase and index social assistance rates to meet the actual cost of living in local communities. Set social assistance shelter allowance rates according to the average cost of rental housing in local communities.[9] Increase the minimum wage to $10 per hour to raise workers' salaries to the poverty line.[10]

9) End the exclusion of people with disabilities from the Ontario Disability Support Program. Overhaul ODSP to ensure that the intake, eligibility determination and review processes are accessible, clear and transparent.

10) Invest additional funds in the development of housing that is truly affordable to those in need. Provide matching funds to ensure that all available federal dollars may be put to use in the timely provision of affordable housing.[11]

11) Reinstate rent control to end the out-of-control escalation of rental housing costs in Ontario. Overhaul the Tenant Protection Act to improve protections for tenants in Ontario.

- **Recommendations to municipal governments**

12) Establish an independent advocacy service for residents with low income to improve their access to needed government programs and to help resolve landlord-tenant issues.

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[9] Position consistent with the Pay the Rent and Feed the Kids Coalition (http://www.paytherent.ca/)
[10] Position consistent with the Justice for Workers Campaign (http://www.toffeonline.org)
[11] Position consistent with the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee's 1% Solution (http://www.tdrc.net)

*Conclusion*

Whether residing in large urban centres, a mid-size city or a smaller locale, food bank recipients face similar struggles to meet basic needs. Across each study community, the majority of food bank recipients experience hunger on a regular basis. Despite the attempts of parents to shield their children from the impact of extreme poverty, alarming numbers of children also experience hunger. At the crux of the issue, insufficient income whether through income assistance programs or low wage work coupled with a lack of affordable housing have left many Ontarians in food bank lines.

Urgent action is needed to improve food security, lessen hunger and reduce the need for food banks in Ontario communities. While the federal government's commitment of new dollars for affordable housing programs is an important first step, substantial long-term investments are needed to address the housing and homelessness crisis in Ontario and across the country. The federal government must ensure that dollars committed are readily accessible to build new housing that is truly affordable for those in need. The provincial government must return to the housing table and begin to commit funds for the provision of affordable housing to ensure that all Ontarians have access to this basic need. Further, major reforms are needed in the area of income assistance to provide proper access to programs and benefits at levels that reflect the actual cost of living in Ontario communities. As well eight long years later, minimum wage workers are in dire need of a raise. Unlike the minimum wage, the cost of living in Ontario has not remained stagnant. Evidenced by long waiting lists for subsidized child care, many parents with children require affordable, quality child care as a prerequisite for

maintaining employment. At the federal and provincial level, new commitments are needed in the area of regulated, affordable child care.

The upcoming federal and provincial elections will provide a new opportunity for political parties to assert their priorities and present their plans for addressing national and provincial issues. Many voices are needed to bring about change that will ensure that everyone can pay the rent, feed themselves, and if they have children, feed the kids. It is our hope that we will witness a renewed commitment on the part of all parties to address these basic survival issues, to reduce hunger, food insecurity and the need for food banks and to ensure access to affordable housing for all.

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